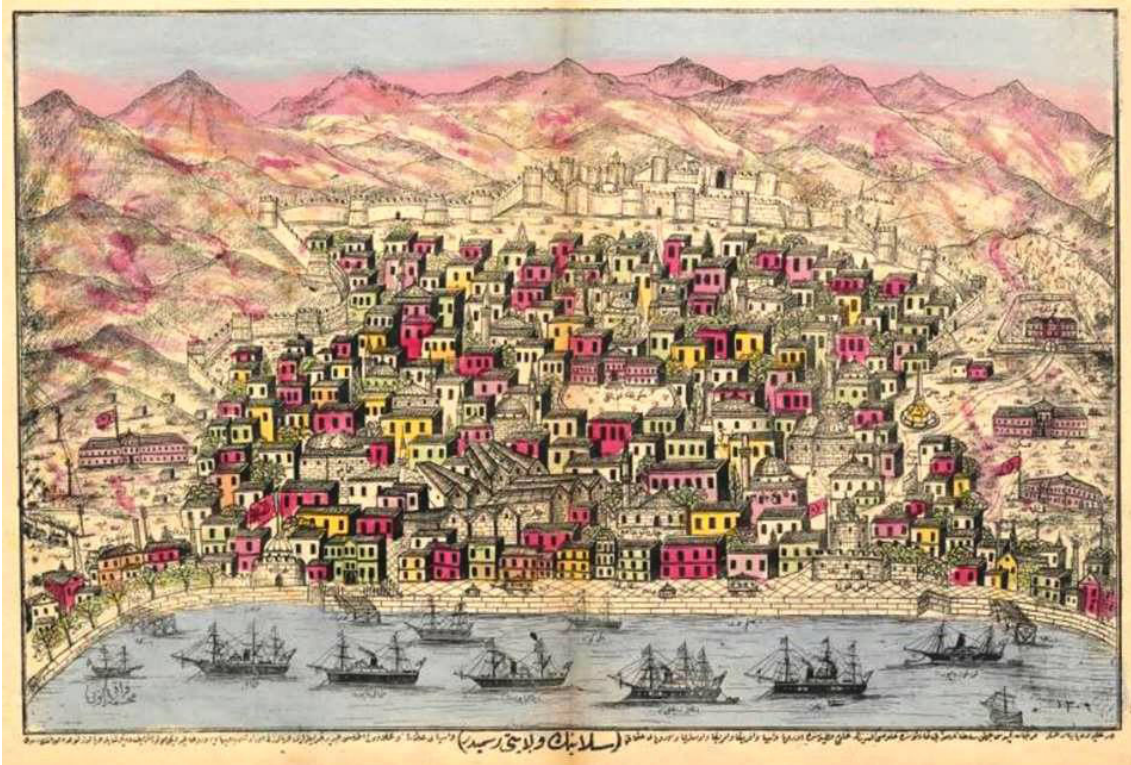


Discussion with Elias Petropoulos regarding Macedonian and Greek issues

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Above: **Solun in 1891**

ELIAS PETROPOULOS is a Greek poet and writer who in 1975 left Greece and went to live in Paris. Discontent with the way he was treated in Greece because of what he thought and wrote he fled to France to pursue what he loves the most, his writing. Petropoulos said he was fed up with the pretentiousness, intolerance, racism and chauvinism that goes on in that country and decided it was time to abandon it.

Elias Petropoulos is one of those rare Greeks who has taken interest in studying the "real" aspects of Balkan culture particularly those of old Salonika (Solun) in Greek occupied Macedonia. As a Greek himself he understands the neo-Greek mentality and what it does to people in modern Greece, particularly to the Macedonians.

Petropoulos accepted to do this interview, conducted by Liljana Kotevska on March 14, 1992, because he felt it was time that he spoke up and let people know how he felt about his experiences in Greece.

Q. Mr. Petropoulos, why are you exiled?

My answer would be for freedom. The freedom to write without being afraid. The freedom to publish my works without fear of persecution. I have been jailed several times in the past. I always wanted to leave Greece so that I can write. I managed to do that in 1975 and since then I have never returned.

My writing is about ideas that are not appreciated by the so-called "intellectuals" in that country. In fact they hate what I write so I am forced to work without a bibliography which means I have to strictly rely on my own memory which is like a vault full of data.



Above: **Solun in the summer of 1908**

Q. You have written a beautiful nostalgic essay about Solun with a picture of the 1912 Greek occupation of that city. What do you remember about that?

My father was a civil servant in the Greek government and as part of his service he was obligated to serve at various places in Greece. During the 1930's he was ordered to go to Northern Greece (i.e. Aegean Macedonia) and serve in Solun. At that time Solun was still a large and multinational city dominated by Jews. I remember Solun was a multi-ethnic city with a mottle of different people with their various languages. Solun was not a ghetto but a city of ethnic communities organized in different neighborhoods each with its own Church, Mosque, or Synagogue and each supporting a different profession or skill. You had your Jews, Greeks, Albanians, Macedonians, Armenians, Bulgars, Serbs, Vlachs, Grekophones, Turkophones, Karamans (Orthodox Turks from Asia Minor), Doimi (Islamized Jews) and Franko-Levantists.

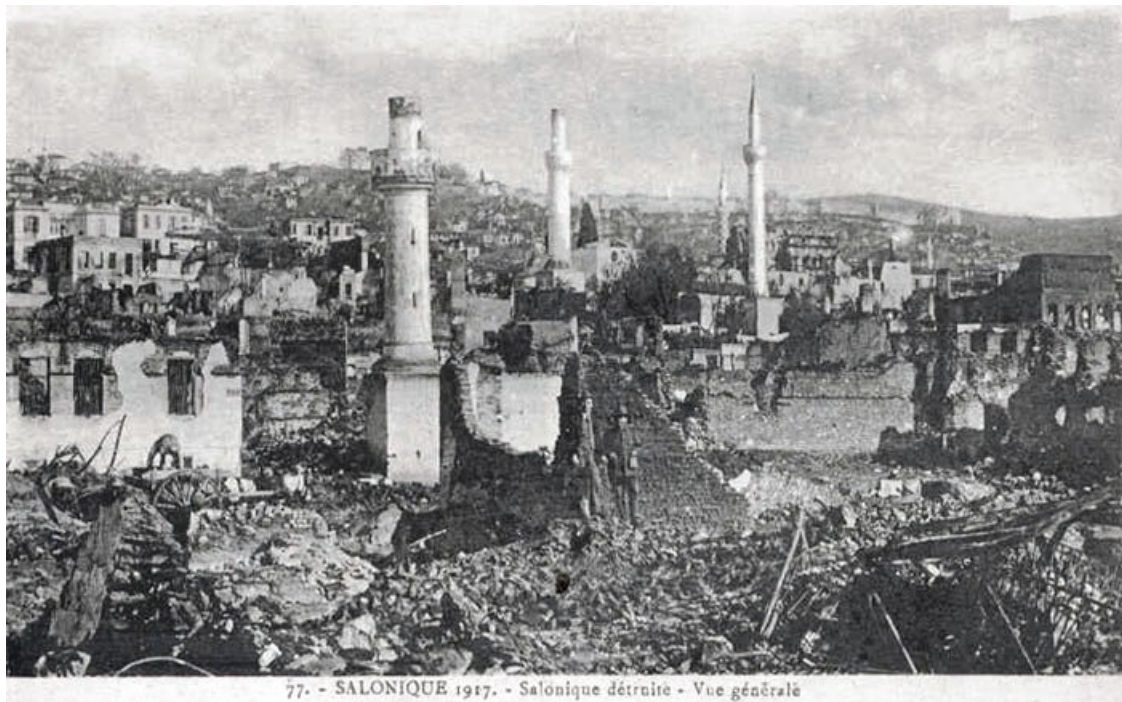
Q. I understand that after Macedonia's division, Solun, the Balkan Metropolis you speak

of, was transformed into a provincial city. What can you tell us about that?

Yes you are right. From that moment on Solun lost its place of being rich and famous and fell into misery. Before the Balkan Wars and before the First World War, Solun was a grand city with its harbors full of foreign ships from all over Europe.

When Solun was taken over by the Greeks it not only lost its multi-ethnic character, it lost its luster and appeal and there was no longer reason for foreign ships to remain there.

Then after more than 40,000 Jews left, Solun was dealt another death blow completely losing its place as a great city.



Above: **Solun in ruins in 1917**

Q. Obviously you were negatively influenced by your experience in Greece and you feel a need to write and expose its chauvinism. What can you tell us about that?

The Greek racism and chauvinism we are witnessing today is mainly due to the educational indoctrination or the kind of education we have all received in Greek schools. From youth children are taught to be paranoid and confrontational towards their neighbors and towards the Balkan reality. Racism in Greece comes in various forms and wears many different masks.

I believe the best remedy for eliminating this sort of behavior is to expose people to the truth and recognize all people for who they truly are.

This reminds me of the time I sent a letter to Melina Merkouri, then Greek Minister of Culture, to let her know that a certain group of archeologists were planning to remove Bogomil graves from the territory of Macedonia to prove that Macedonians never set foot

in this Greek territory. I saw this with my own eyes and even took photographs which I later sent to Athens and Paris. Unfortunately, the Minister never answered my letter nor did she make any comment to the articles I wrote about that, which only proves that she not only knew about it, she was part of the conspiracy to cover up the existence of Macedonian graves in Macedonia. And by doing that did she really prove that Slavs never laid a foot in this "holy land of Greece"?

Q. One of Greece's most tragic periods is the Greek Civil War. What do you remember about that?

About that! In 1990 I published a book entitled "Corpses, corpses, corpses" in which I covered the German occupation of 1941 to 1944 and the Greek Civil War of 1946 to 1949.

Even though the democratic movement in that period [during the Greek Civil War] was bathed in blood the real Greek tragedy came later during the Karamanlis dictatorship of 1955 to 1963. This is the period during which the democratic people of Greece were truly smothered. If you ask an outsider even if they are Europeans they will say the worst period in Greece was the Greek Civil War or the dictatorship of the Colonels but the truth is the Karamanlis era was the worst. If I can describe him in any way I would say he is the murderer of Greek culture.

Q. Mr. Petropoulos, are you familiar with the story of the 28,000 refugee children which were exiled during the Greek Civil War and since then have been displaced all over the world?

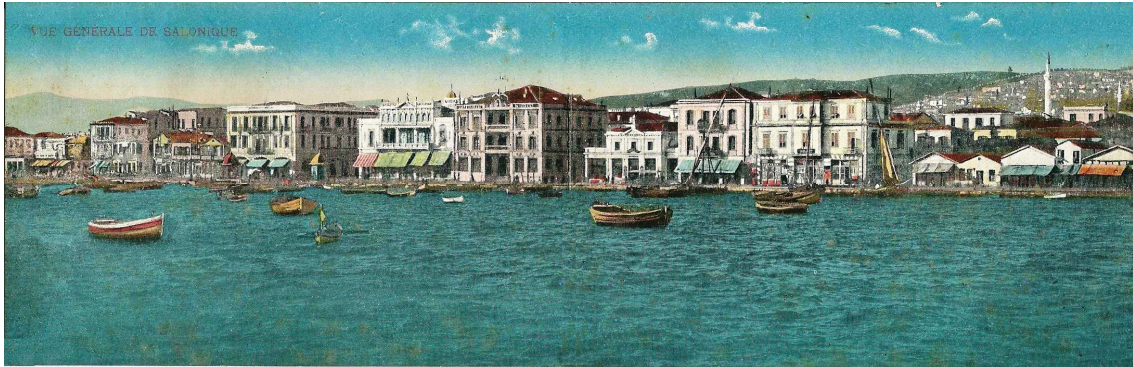
I am well aware of their story but not all the children are Macedonian, some are from other parts of Greece. What is more frightening than that story is the story of the children caught by the Greek Monarcho-fascists. Did you know that the Monarcho-fascists had orders to take by force, kidnap children from the groups that were leaving? These children, under the protection of Queen Frederica, were all sent to isolated schools which existed everywhere in Greece from Solun to Rhodes. These schools were like jails and children taught there were destined to become the new Praetorian Guard or the janissary in Greece's service.

Q. How was the defeat of the Democratic Army of Greece and General Markos treated in Greece?

This is a very intricate question whose answer can fill an entire book. In hindsight we know that Stalin abandoned the Partisans in Greece and left them to meet their own fate. Tito too gave up on them when he broke off his relations with the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG).

We also know that Tito allowed the Monarcho-fascists to enter Yugoslavia in 1949 to cut off the Partisans from retreating.

As for Markos, I believe he was a good person and did his job during the occupation and during the Greek Civil War but failed to stop the political failures and subsequent liquidations.



Q. Mr. Petropoulos what can you tell us about the military dictatorships in Greece?

The so-called "Colonel Dictatorship", I can tell you, was tragic but more comical than dangerous.

It is well known that there have always been tortures committed in Greece. In fact no matter what regime was in power, it committed torture but none more than the Karamanlis regime. The Karamanlis regime was particularly brutal by its specific targeting of the leftists. When Papadopoulos, the leader of the dictatorship took over, he began to torture everyone, even those on the right. The Greek bourgeoisie was caught by surprise by this one because Greece had now regressed and had re-introduced the old classic method of torture only to use it against itself. How ironic? You can't trust anything or anyone in Greece.

Q. There is an ongoing dispute between an Orthodox cleric and a number of Greek artists like Kazantzakis, Angelopoulos and his latest film, etc. What can you tell us about that?

There are certain Metropolitans, voyeurs of a neo-Orthodox movement, who are trying to scare Angelopoulos and other people involved in cinema, like Freda Ljuna, Kazantzakis, etc.. As for Kazantzakis himself, he is not really in serious trouble because he never was a revolutionary and he wears a ten-meter cross on his chest. But in Rondis's and Laskaratos's case they are in real trouble, that is why those two were in jail. Rondis is a good artist and may be one of the most important and most captivating of Greek writers.

Q. Going back to Solun. Nowadays we witness one massive manifestation of Greek chauvinism in Solun against the international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia. What can you tell us about that?

The massive meeting of the "people" as was presented by Greek authorities was organized and supported by all the political parties in Greece. This was a dangerous chauvinist manifestation. As I recall there was word that the residents of Solun were claiming they did not know who these "Macedonians" were. Perhaps they were pretending they didn't know because according to official Greece "Macedonians don't exist". If they don't exist then how can there be a name for a people that don't exist? And if they don't exist how could the residents of Solun know about them? This is what the "sold-out" professors from the University in Solun were saying. These are the same "sold-out" professors who have been trying their best to prove "the Greek-ness of Macedonia". And if I may add, these are the same "sold-out" professors who can't even

prove their own Greek-ness.

Take a look at Karamanlis for example. His mother is a Macedonic speaker and his father is a Turkish speaker (original name Kalaycioglou, orthodox Turk from Manlis, Asia Minor).¹ How about Manolis Andronikos? How “Greek” is he? This is not an exception; this applies to every Modern “Greek”. Every “Greek” has his own non-Greek story. That is why "Greeks" like these have an inferiority complex and need to boast about their Greek-ness, need to play the "super patriot card" and hold lectures on patriotism...



Q. As I recall Kostantinos Karamanlis, in the beginning of this year, wrote a letter to his European partners calling their attention to the “Macedonian question”. Will the Europeans give him their attention?

Karamanlis is of no significance in Europe. Europe is currently passing through a phase, a transformation of shedding its wool and this is complicating things in the Balkans. Greece has no strategy in its national politics and is nervously reacting to the changing situation. This nervousness is manifesting itself in bad politics and horrible diplomacy. Instead of acting rationally Greece is reacting irrationally to the new situation, causing disharmony in the region. Whatever war Greece was fighting, it has lost it. Today Turkey is rising in dominance in the region between the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Caspian

¹ His nephew, Ex-Prime Minister: Kostas Karamanlis, former surname: Kalayciouglu (Christian Turk from Asia Minor): "Karamanlis's forefathers lived in Karaman, Turkey. The family's former (Turkish) surname was Kalaycioglu. When the family left Turkey, they changed their surname into 'Karamanlis'." (Data recently removed from Wikipedia) But helpfully on Wikipedia there's a "View history" button:

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kostas_Karamanlis&diff=159321238&oldid=159313924#Earlier_Karamanlis

Sea. Turkey will become a great power and fast.

Q. In the publication entitled "Minorities in Greece" published in Athens some time ago there is a mention that the "Slavo-Macedonians" are the third largest group of people. What do you know about that?

Unfortunately Greek politicians are unwilling to accept the reality and are consumed by their destructive tactics of playing the nationalist or racist card. The Greek government was well versed with the term "Macedonia the country" from many international communications but now the instant that country became a reality Greece found a need to negate its existence. The Greek government is as blind to the existence of the country Macedonia as it is blind to a lot of internal problems to which it remarks with expressions like "we may not be far from the day when the christians will ask for the independence of Crete".

Q. What do you think of Macedonia? What does Macedonia mean to you?

The Kurds before Xenophone's epoch moved between Armenia and Mesopotamia but did not succeed in securing a country of their own, but the Macedonians did. The neo-Greeks think they are the descendents of the Ancient Greeks and of the Byzantines and by that they believe they have exclusive right to the name "Macedonia". These are the same people who insisted that Istanbul be called Constantinople. I think my Greek compatriots have many more bitter pills to swallow...

Elias Petropoulos Interviewed by Liljana Kotevska, March 14, 1992. Epoha, pages 34-36; also on "Macedonian Spark" online journal

<http://macedonianspark.com/en/history-ideology/interview/493-2011-01-30-17-52-10>